



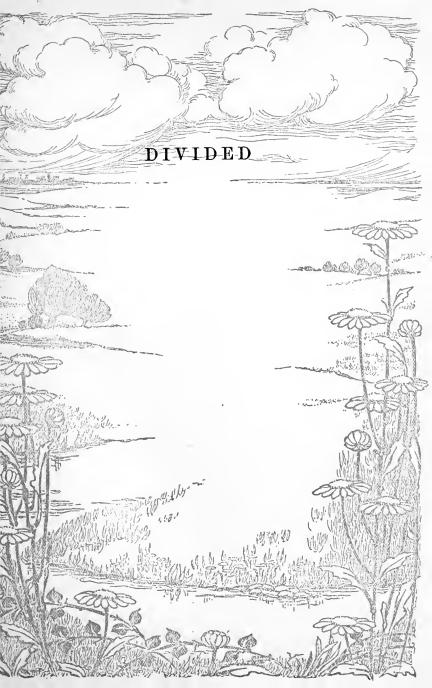
Joy Lindston, With all good wishes for Howard S. Nichole La Angoles. -. December 25, 1933.



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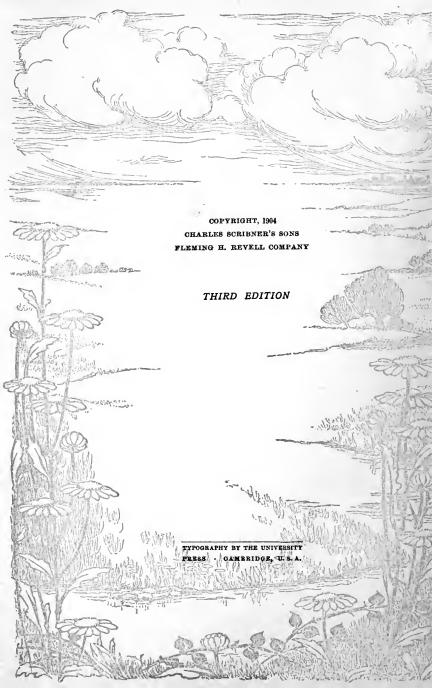
The STORY

of a

POEM

CLARA E. LAUGHLIN

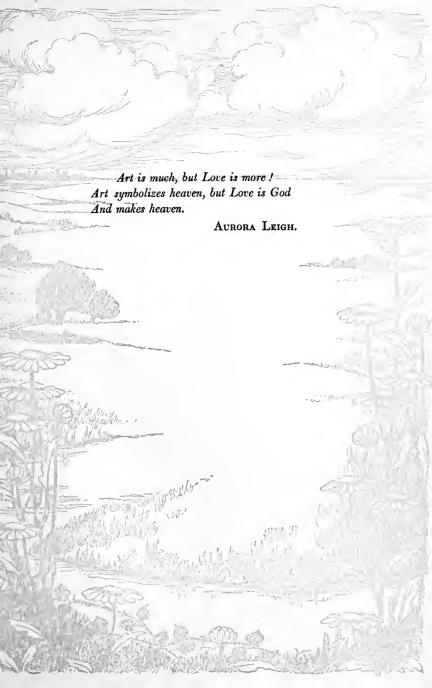
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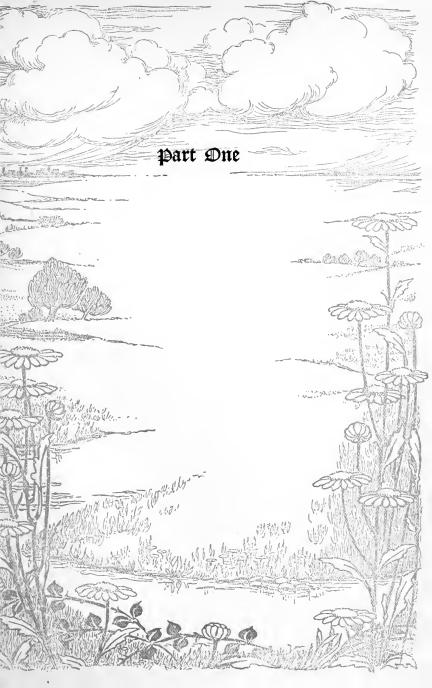


To those toilers who have never loosed the clasp of Love to follow the winding way to Fame











DIVIDED

THE STORY OF A POEM

Part One

SHE was a lonely little girl in a bleak farmhouse. Years ago her mother had come hither, flushed with romantic sacrifice, from the teaching of literature in a semi-rural academy to the practical facts of "help-meeting" on a farm that only grudgingly yielded its stout-hearted young owner a bare sustenance.

From the eminence of being appealed to from three counties to say who wrote "Beautiful Snow," and who was the greatest American poet, and why, the little girl's mother had come to take up the love-life

her poets told about, in a home whose treadmill demands broke her feeble spirit long, even, before they were out her frail body. Love had not failed her, but it had failed to satisfy her. The poor little spirit that had fattened on the husks of neighborhood eminence and a hectic love of sentiment, starved on the ripe grain of motherhood and an honest love; and when the little girl was eight years old she found herself vaguely mourning her motherlessness and deriving no little satisfaction from the fillip to her imagination provided by a picture in one of her mother's poetry books, representing an enormous angel flying over the housetops of a city, bearing to cloudlands above the figure of a fullgrown woman.

The little girl missed her mother rather more sentimentally than actu-



ally, for the broken-spirited woman had given no companionship and little even of supervision to her child. But the child had an inherited sentimentality; she knew it was a pathetic thing to be motherless, every one said so,—the poetry books, the neighbors, even her big, kind, quiet father, who indulged her more than ever because she had no mother, now.

And so the little girl, whom her mother had named Aurora, for love of Aurora Leigh, went her lonely way across the fields to school when the weather permitted (a question which she alone decided), and when it did n't, sat curled up for long hours in some quiet corner absorbed with her dead mother's Family Editions of Longfellow and Whittier and Burns, and her well-worn copies of Felicia Hemans, Owen Meredith,

and Jean Ingelow, whereout of her untrained fancy read marvels of literalness and constructions that might well have wrought consternation in the authors.

Many of the poems mystified her unpleasantly, many of them she liked not at all; but of her many favorites one gave her, above all, the supreme satisfaction of continually piquing her interest. It answered all the purposes of the Sphinx to the lonely child, who was forever questioning it and never getting any answer.

It was the opening poem in a redbound book by Jean Ingelow, and it was called "Divided." Perhaps its illustrations were its chief charm; the first of them represented a boy and girl, of about Aurora's age, playing in a meadow starred with flowers, — for all the world like the south meadow of Aurora's father. The boy chased

butterflies, his hat in hand poised for capture, and the girl gathered In the next picture they posies. knelt, jubilant, beside a tiny silver thread of water trickling through the grass. Parting the grasses to determine its course, the laughing children, in picture three, held each other's hands across the baby brook, and started to run with it. In picture four, the brooklet had become a brook, and the children, following their new treasure towards its mouth, had to loose their mutual clasp as they ran, one on either bank. In the picture following, the brook had widened still more, and the boy and girl, now larger grown, waved gayly at each other from their opposite sides. By and by it became a river, and the flower-starred fields led the way to a town of masts and spires; they could no longer call across, but only signal,

yet they kept on, and on, and on. At last the river, passing the town, widened to a great estuary, and on a shore whose opposite was not even dimly discernible, the girl, a woman grown, and weary, stood and waved a signal to the companion she could not see, and from whom no answering signal came to her.

Aurora agonized over the story. What did it all mean? Why did they let go hands? Or why, if after letting go they found the stream separating them, did they not go back a little space, and either abandon the trail or follow it together? The joys of their companionship looked so beatific to the lonely child, she marvelled herself heartsick over their separation. Why, when they found themselves divided, did not one cross to the other side? And it was significant, deeply significant, of Aurora

that she never questioned who that one should be, but always, while sorrowing unto anguish with the woman at the end, blamed the little girl in the beginning for letting go.

There was a brook in her father's south meadow, — a full-grown, troutyielding brook, to be sure, and not an incipient trickle playing hide and seek among the grasses; but there were flowers just as in the picture; and Aurora looked to that meadow to yield her, some day, a boy companion who should-chase butterflies, cap in hand, just as the boy in the book chased them. And most determined was Aurora, if that boy were ever found, never to adventure with him where they could not hold hands across, never to lose him for lack of going over to his side, as a woman should.

One day,—such is, some times, the power of faith,—one warm, bright June day in the summer, when Aurora was ten, she wandered lone-somely down into the south meadow to think about the boy and all that he typified of companionship, and, lo! there he was, fishing in her father's brook.

The very white bare feet that he dangled in the clear water were all that was needed to denote a being from remote parts,—in other words, The Boy! Wrapped in delicious deductions of her own, Aurora stood so long silently contemplating the boy that he grew restive.

"Well," he snapped finally, with a suddenness and a testiness that nearly precipitated Aurora into the brook, "what you gawking at?"

Aurora evaded the question.

"You can't catch trout that way,"

she volunteered, after an awkward silence. It was an ill beginning.

"What way?" demanded the boy, haughtily.

"The way you're doin'," rejoined Aurora, losing her first awe and waxing bold with the consciousness of superior knowledge.

"You dassent to put your feet in the water when you're fishin' fer trout! Why, you dassent even to leave your shadow be on the water, they're that timid and smart! You got to git out o' sight, an' not leave 'em see your line even, and bait with a grasshopper, and be awful quiet."

It cost the boy a struggle to know how to receive this gratuitous advice, but two hours of patient dangling and flicking the water with his gaudy patent fly, had prepared him to hearken to Aurora's wisdom with inner, but not outer, meekness. That she was right, he more than mistrusted, but how to avoid saying so, that was the question.

The white feet, therefore, remained defiantly in the water, and the gaudy fly continued to keep wary trout at a distance, while between the two on opposite banks of the wee brook a rather ominous silence rested.

"Where do you live?" asked the boy at length, with as superior an air as he could manage.

Aurora indicated, with a backward jerk of her thumb, the farmhouse whose paintless estate she did not know enough by comparison to deplore.

"I live in New York," said the boy, without waiting to be asked. Aurora gasped,—so audibly that the boy almost forgave her for her advice about the trout.

"Ever been there?" he asked, and the meekness of her faltering, "No, oh, no!" put the boy again in good favor with himself and in a proper masculine position of superiority.

He was Garrett Levering, he informed her, visiting his uncle, Amos Levering, for the school holidays.

His uncle lived on the best farm in the vicinity, and owned the best farmhouse for miles around; but this gave him no particular aristocracy in Aurora's mind, there being small notion of caste among the hard-working farmers of those parts where the best-off and the poorest alike tilled their own land and garnered their own yields. In New York, however, Garrett went on to explain, he lived in a brownstone front, four stories high,—and seeing that four stories conveyed little meaning to Aurora, who had never

seen a house of more than one story and a half, he elucidated by saying that it was as high as the giant elm against whose lofty bole Aurora's little home-cot leaned, small as a toddling child against a great man's knees. This comparison was something of an exaggeration; but the boy knew it no more than the girl, so really sky-high did his home loom in his proud memory, alongside the low-roofed cottages of the country. The first impression of that great stone house reaching far into the sky, stayed with Aurora for many years and lent its majesty to the boy who emanated therefrom for her companionship.

That summer Aurora read no more poetry books; she had never divulged to Garrett her former interest in them, being a little sentimentally shy about *the* poem which he was

in part realizing for her, and, for the rest, feeling that "A Psalm of Life," "Snowbound," "Miles Standish," even "Bingen on the Rhine" were ill worth mentioning after the tales Garrett told her about Richard and Saladin, the "Scottish Chiefs," and "Robinson Crusoe."

When, however, the first of September was at hand, and Garrett was about to go, with only a possibility of return the following June, the pall of separation, the shadow of dread of her former loneliness, lay heavy on the spirit of Aurora.

He left on a Sunday afternoon, and after the early dinner at his uncle's, Garrett obtained permission to trudge, in his Sunday suit of black and his shining black shoes, the two miles of hot, dusty road to Aurora's house, to say good-bye. Bantered by his uncle's family, he set off, and

received by Aurora's father with a good-natured but insinuating grin, he was bidden to "set out in the vard where it's cooler," and to take off his coat for comfort. This latter Garrett, with chilling dignity, declined to do, and Aurora's father was reminded how averse her mother had been to the practice, — which sent him ruminating into the house where, in the shelter of the kitchen porch, he weighed the chances of Aurora's getting "mixed up with a city feller, some day," and suffering the rebuffs for her country rudeness that he had suffered for his in days gone by.

Left to themselves, the children were a little constrained at first. Garrett was not specially depressed by the impending separation. He had the world-old masculine advantage of new activities ahead to anticipate, minimizing the reluctance he might have felt at leaving a pleasant summer behind. Aurora, however, woman-like, enjoyed no such advantage. Change, for her, meant simply a staying behind in scenes long irksome through familiarity, and now to be more bare of charm than ever by reason of the passing of companionship. The colorlessness of the seasons before he came, ranged in Aurora's mind alongside the delights of this summer, and the future looked drearier than ever to her without him. Garrett was typical male enough to realize this dimly, and to chafe under it, as a man-creature chafes under parting,—half sympathy for the woman, half impatience to be gone.

The shadow of the sky-high house waiting to receive him, added to the tragedy of his leaving, made the conversational channels of other days

seem quite inadequate to Aurora, and she strove, with real woman bravery, to turn the talk in the direction of his future interests, — when his school began, what he was going to study, and if he should be glad to see "the fellows,"—and to keep it off the subject of her own distress.

At length the afternoon began to wane, and Garrett must go. After tea his uncle was to drive him to the depot, and put him on the train, and late that night his father would be at the station in Jersey City to take him home. To-morrow school would begin.

Not until the moment came to say the actual good-bye, did Aurora summon courage enough to ask him if he thought he would come again next summer. He did n't know — maybe so; maybe not. But if she came to New York, she must come and see him. Aurora thanked him, and voiced nothing of the bitter disbelief in her own heart that she should ever go to New York. She was as likely, she thought, to go to the moon.

When Garrett was actually gone,
— out of sight down the dusty road,
— Aurora went up to her little room
in the half-story of her paintless
home, and threw herself on her bed,
and cried and cried.

"Gosh!" said her father, who tiptoed to her door, and tip-toed away again.

When she got up it was six o'clock, the time Garrett was to take his train. And, going to the little hanging shelf where she kept her neglected poetry books, she took down her favorite, and for the first time in her starved little life, full of harsh practicalities, a symbolism flashed upon

her inner sight. The literalness of her former renderings became foolishness to her in the twinkling of a tearwet eye, and "I know," she said, shutting the book with a sob, "it was n't a brook; he had to go away."





Part Two

GARRETT did not come next summer. He went to Europe, whence he wrote Aurora once or twice,—boyish letters filled with statistics of things seen. Nor did he come the next summer, nor the next, nor the next. Several times there was some little talk of his coming, always faithfully reported to Aurora by his uncle's folks. But his father had bought a place at the seashore, and Garrett preferred going there each year, and renewing acquaintance with the companionable young people of the other cottages.

After five summers of sailing and swimming and other seaside pleasures, however, the place rather palled on Garrett, just beginning to know

the ennui of eighteen. In June of that year, therefore, when he was preparing to take his examinations for college, his father proposed to him that, since he was so tired of Long Beach, he might go up to his uncle's and put in a long, quiet summer of hard work and simple living.

Garrett thought of the dusty country roads, the low-roofed, stuffy farm-house, the wide, shadeless meadows, without enthusiasm. But ambition had laid hold on him; he was looking forward to his college career with boundless enthusiasm, and when he thought of the long summer days with absolutely nothing to divert him from his books, he decided to go, and one June afternoon was set down on the blistering board platform of the station at Overbrook with a bicycle, a tennis set, an up-to-date fishing out-

fit, a guitar, a collie dog, a camera, a trunk of large dimensions, and a very nobby valise,—furnishing the station loungers with food for a month's conversation at least.

"This here's Mr. P. T. Barnum," said Uncle Amos, facetiously, to Aunt Leila, as they drove up to the porch; "and these," indicating Garrett's paraphernalia with his whip, "is his menagerie; he's brought the hull of it along."

In this jovially tolerant spirit Uncle Amos and Aunt Leila accepted the lank Garrett, shooting up toward six feet, and all his "fangle-dangles," as Uncle Amos termed the tennis, the hand camera (then a great novelty), the high-wheel bicycle, the guitar, and the "Sportsman's Standard" fishing outfit.

"I'm afraid," said Aunt Leila, in confidence to Uncle Amos, as he

smoked his pipe in the kitchen doorway while she cleared away the supper dishes, "that Garrett's goin' to be kind o' lonely; I mistrust how our country boys'll take them fal-lals. I hope they won't hurt his feelin's."

"Don't you worry, Ma," soothed Uncle Amos, a shrewd, kindly twinkle in his keen blue eyes; "I would n't wonder if Garrett 'd find out some things this summer that they don't teach in college; but they won't hurt him none."

The object of their solicitude seemed fairly content, sitting on the front porch and smoking the little "bull-dog" brier pipe, familiarity with which had been his first idea of preparing himself for college.

The next morning, however, after an hour of Horace, he was more attuned in spirit to "green fields and running brooks," than to "rendering" and syntax; so, putting away his books, he got up, thinking to hunt a favorable place to lay out his tennis court, and, while he was looking, he might be doing something with the camera.

It was hot, very hot, when he left the shade of Aunt Leila's garden and set foot on the dusty road; and something in the heat and the dust brought back to mind prim little, perspiring Aurora, as she had looked that Sunday afternoon in her stiffly starched white dress and vivid pink bows. He had almost, if not altogether, forgotten Aurora of late. After those statistical letters from Paris and London, he had written once or twice, but halfheartedly, and at long intervals, and Aurora's last letter he had answered not at all. He could remember, now, when it came to him, in the flush of preparing for that first summer in

their own home by the sea, and how its stilted little sentences about the brook in the south meadow being swollen by the spring rains, and Daisy, the gray mare, baving a colt, struck him as unworthy of him and reminiscent of an acquaintance that progress bade him forget.

Now, as the recollection of her flashed over him, it was not unpleasant to contemplate the effect of his great stature, his threatening mustache, his bull-dog pipe, his bicycle, his guitar, his camera, his tennis set, and "Sportsman's Standard" on the gawky country girl. Garrett quite liked the idea of her surprise and awe. Perhaps he would take her picture, he promised himself, recalling sundry novels he had read, in lazy hammocks on summer days, of artists who went sketching and painting in rural parts, and stirred up

"tumult of emotions" in the breasts of their nut-brown models. With all his holy zeal for books, Garrett was at the age when stirring up a tumult of emotions in the breast of anything young and feminine was no ill-favored thought.

Accordingly, he faced him in the direction of Aurora's home, and the two miles thereto seemed but a stride, so lightly buoyant were the thoughts of conquest that carried him along. How surprised she would be to see him! She would remember him, of Doubtless, it being early in the morning (early by city notions of time), she would be unprepared for company, - more than probably confused at being caught about her homely tasks. But he would reassure her, Garrett promised himself. He would tell her how picturesque the peasant women of Europe were

in their field dress, how infinitely preferable, to the artist eye, to the modish women of the cities. (Garrett had just read this in a monthly magazine.)

How would she look, he wondered! His recollection of her was limited to her brown feet, decorated with stone bruises, her slender brown legs that used to wade in the brook, and the comical incongruity of her stiff white dress on the one occasion when he had seen her in her best-attire. He could not even remember if her eyes were blue or brown, if her hair was dark or light,—having been, when he knew her, at an age when the masculine eye takes least note of the quality of feminine charm.

Arrived before the little, low-roofed house, Garrett hardly knew it. His recollection of it was that it was very bleak and comfortless-looking, that

it suggested (though this is not quite the way he put it to himself) a poverty not of means alone, but of spirit. Now it was freshly painted, — white, with green blinds, — and there were hollyhocks growing in the yard where the long grass made no pretence of being a lawn, but shot up into flower and seed as it listed, nor refused room to many a delicate four-o'clock swaying on slender, supple stems.

Aurora would be at her housework, Garrett thought, — churning, perhaps, or feeding the chickens; those were his sole ideas of country women's industry. Ought he to knock at the seldom-used front door, and give her time to "primp" ere she came to open? Or should he walk round to the side or back, and surprise her? Politeness dictated the former course; dramatic instinct the latter, and dramatic instinct won.

To the side-door, therefore, Garrett proceeded. Although he had not come a-wheel, he had worn his bicycle suit of gray "knickers" and hose, with Oxford ties. It was too hot for his natty Norfolk jacket, but he wore it bravely; also, in the stead of a straw hat, his peaked woollen cap to match his suit. If anything one-half so splendid had ever been at Aurora's side-door before, Garrett knew little about the probabilities in a one-horse country town.

Before he had rounded the corner of the house the pungent smell of suds smote his nostrils. Aurora was washing! A jutting angle of the house hid the side-door from view until one was quite upon it, and there, on a sort of platform made by the widening of the board walk, a lusty country girl stood rubbing coarse clothes with hands that looked cap-

able of felling an ox. Garrett gave a gasp of surprise, but the keeping of "hired help" in these parts was, he knew, extremely exceptional; therefore the young lady of the house this must be.

Lifting his cap with a courtly deference, he inquired if he had the honor of addressing Miss Aurora Russell.

"La!" said the lady addressed, and, after an interval of frank examination, "No; she ain't to hum."

"She still lives here, does she?"
Garrett inquired, replacing his cap.

Yes, she lived there, but she had gone out nearly an hour ago; no, the lady addressed could not say where she might be.

Thanking her, Garrett took his way down the plank walk, past the well and the barn, in the direction of the south meadow. Back of the

house was the orchard, a scraggly little patch of poor-pedigreed apples and "picklin' pears" which never grew luscious and golden. In spite of its poverty, however, it was Junebeautiful to-day, but Aurora was not there.

She was by the brook-side in the south meadow, book in hand, and her book was Jean Ingelow's poems, bound in red.

She wore a pink frock of a nice material hideously denominated seer-sucker, and a pink sunbonnet to match, while her slim brown feet were most circumspectly encased in white cotton stockings and neat black slippers.

Although she had a book in her hand, Aurora was not reading, — that is, not until she became aware, out of the corner of her eye, of an unwontedly nobby figure striding down

in her direction from the orchard. Then her absorption in the poetess became prodigious; not even the shadow that fell across her book roused her until a gentle "Ahem!" made her start as if stung. Then she looked up, 'way up, and Garrett grinned.

"I guess you don't know me," he said. Aurora looked puzzled for a moment.

"Why, it's Garrett Levering!" she exclaimed, as if she could hardly believe her senses.

Yes, he assured her, it was Garrett, and, if he was not mistaken, she was Aurora Russell, who had once given him a lesson in fishing for trout. Having said so much, Garrett was at a loss, for a few seconds, for further speech; he had forgotten to calculate on the girl's being pretty!

Aurora was better prepared; she had pictured him so much, and so idealizingly, that it would scarcely have surprised her to find his head three feet farther into the clouds than it was, or his distinguished bearing three times augmented (if that could have been possible). Aurora had her due complement of Garrett had come feminine finesse. there to find her, had found her, and was no more able to dissimulate the fact than any man of eighteen, or twice eighteen. Aurora had come here to be found, had realized her expectations, but was woman-child enough to appear dumfounded by the unheralded apparition. And as guile is readier of tongue than simple honesty, Aurora advanced to command of the situation long before Garrett's frankly astonished gaze had done wandering from point to point

of her, as if in pursuit of some least suggestion of the girl of six years ago.

It was not (although Garrett did not know this) that the girl was so pretty, but that she appealed so strongly to the imagination, - which is a much more dangerous quality, of course, than any amount of mere prettiness. There was something in the unconscious grace of her supple young body that thrilled one like the swaying of tall grasses, and there was an unforgettable look in the serious brown eyes, — a look that might record or portend almost anything. Garrett was more bewildered than merely admiring, and while he ponawkwardly and obviously, Aurora plied him with questions as to when he had come, how long he was to stay, and the like, - just as if she had not been informing herself

on these points by interrogating his uncle's family for an interminable fortnight.

When he found his sober senses somewhat, he inquired of Aurora, politely, what she was reading. Told it was poetry, he inquired whose. Told it was Jean Ingelow's, he inquired if Aurora liked it. Told that she did, he made request that she read him some passages, and then threw himself down alongside her, as the painters in the novels always did by their nut-brown heroines.

Aurora considered her poem for a brief moment, then turned shyly toward the back of the volume, as far away from it as possible, and read, sedately, "Seven Times" conscientiously through, from "Seven Times One" to "Seven Times Seven."

Sympathy lent modulation to her clear young voice, and Garrett, listen-

ing, caught far less of Miss Ingelow's intent than of the more salient fact that the girl who read was a poetry-lover,—a kindred soul, in other words.

One poem from the book sufficed, for when the heart beats young it has recourse to poetry only to stimulate itself; old hearts read to forget, — young hearts read to be reminded that the world is theirs.

Talking of poetry, Garrett asked Aurora if she liked Shelley,—that dear idol of youth!—and Aurora pleading ignorance of his poems, Garrett recited to her snatches of "The Skylark," "The Cloud," "To Jane, With a Guitar," "Constantia, Singing," and "The Sensitive Plant." Aurora's face flushed with delight in their beauty, but the poems that moved her to her young soul's depth, Garrett soon learned, were poems

like "Evangeline," "Enoch Arden," and "The Idvlls of a King." Her perception of beauty was good, considering that it had been so wholly uneducated; but passionate appreciation of the human drama requires no preparation save a nature tuned to sympathy. In her starved little life Aurora had not turned, as so many lonely souls do, to Nature for companionship, but had sat through the procession of the years, - bud and blossom and fruit and seed, requiem and resurrection, bird-song and soughing wind, - indifferent to the drama of earth, and wistful to be close to the human drama; unregardful, of course, of the human drama as it played itself at Overbrook, - but that was to be expected of her youth.

From Shelley and her confession of fealty to Longfellow and Tenny-

son, it seemed but a step, to Garrett, to the declaration of his own poetic purposes, — a confidential murmur of some of his achievements, even.

Aurora was entranced, though the poems recited to her by their author were so crammed with mythological allusions that she could scarcely catch their meaning.

It was high noon ere it seemed to the young people by the brook that they had fairly exchanged civilities, and Garrett, getting up to go, remembered his camera and posed slim, sweet Aurora for a "snap-shot." They made no tryst for further meetings, but each knew, as if the words had been spoken, that the little brook would witness many.

At dinner, Uncle Amos inquiring if he had spent a pleasant morning, Garrett replied that he had, and went so much further as to add that

he had been looking for a good, level place to set up his tennis.

But after Uncle Amos had gone back to his haying, Garrett followed Aunt Leila into the kitchen and took up his station, with her permission, in the vine-shaded back porch, with his bull-dog pipe and an air of lazy content, but an inward burning to find out all he could about Aurora Russell.

After some desultory remarks about the state of the weather for haying, and answers to Aunt Leila's inquiries about members of his family, he observed:

"While I was looking for a place to lay out my tennis court, this morning, I stumbled on that little Aurora Russell I used to play with, years ago when I was here."

"She's a real nice little thing," said his aunt; "but I mistrust how

she's goin' to turn out,—the way her father brings her up."

On Garrett's inquiry what that way might be, practical, hard-working Aunt Leila shook her head ominously.

"You know her ma was a schoolteacher," she began, "and had a lot of high-falutin' notions. Not-that poetry and all that ain't all right for them that have time for it, but you can't run a farm and moon over poetry books at the same time, and Aurora's ma wa'n't never no helpmeet to her pa; it's kind of a good thing she died, poor body, though it does seem hard to say it. this little gal's got her ma's ways, all over; and her pa, Jake Russell, is that soft over the child, and that foolish about thinkin' mebbe farm life was too hard for her ma, and wore her out before her time, that he

don't make Aurora do a thing, - hires help to keep the house, and lets that young gal do as she pleases. Fortunately she's a good child, and never does no harm. But that ain't the point, I say! What is the point is what's goin' to become of that gal when her pa's dead and gone, or when she's married to some hardworkin' farmer that 'll need his butter made, and his cookin' done, and a thousand things, and her knowin' nothin' 'bout any of them, only 'bout poetry and the likes? It's a terrible thing to bring up a shiftless gal in these parts, I can tell you!"

Garrett made no reply, but, towards three o'clock, he remarked that he believed he would take a book "out, somewhere," and study, and, Shelley in hand, took the direction of the brook, where he found Aurora, without a book this time, her slim brown hands clasped about her updrawn knees and a wondrous look of eager expectancy on her sweet young face.

Intimacy becomes a thing of moments under such conditions. Within three days Aurora had confided to Garrett the story of the poem, and her belief that the brook symbolized parting such as theirs of six years before, with the fluttering of letters, first, then silence.

"But now I have you back again," said the little maid, naïvely. She made no secret of her joy in him.

And within a week Garrett had written three poems to her, had photographed her daily, and had made her the repository of all his dreams touching a poetic career.

And so the summer waxed to its zenith. Billy, the collie, was adopted into the concern; the guitar was kept

strung for the playing of plaintive little melodies out under the trees on warm, moonlit July nights; the "Sportsman's Standard" came into use, because, while one may not talk and catch trout, one may talk and fish for them, and, moreover, in circumstances like these, one may be very still and yet very happy. The tennis got little use, however, and the dizzy high bicycle still less. And it was to be feared that those of Garrett's books to which he was-giving most attention were not those familiarity with which makes for highest marks in a college examination. But there was none to chide, and few but the brook itself and the cows in the south meadow knew what was going on under the shade of sycamores and willow bushes by the brook's brink.

In August the inevitable happened; they had a quarrel. Like most seri-

ous quarrels, it began in some absolutely unimportant trifle. They had agreed to meet by the brook on an August afternoon at three o'clock. It was a torrid day, a day of sullen heat, - overhead a brazen sky, underfoot a baked, dry earth. At noon Aurora's father came in from the fields exhausted, seeing through a red mist and dizzy unto nausea. In their seldom-used parlor, a north room, the green shutters were tightclosed, only a faint ray of light struggling in through their crevices, and there Jake Russell laid him down on the horsehair sofa, with a cool, clean pillow under his giddy head, and cloths wrung out of cold well-water laid on his forehead and at the base of his brain.

To Aurora, who came to him in alarm, he said there was nothing to worry about, only on no account must she venture out of the house before sundown. Aurora had been an indulged child, but she had never learned disobedience therefrom, and three o'clock came and went, and she kept no tryst by the brook.

The sun was no sooner down, however, than she sped to the meeting place, hopeful that Garrett might have been detained at home by his uncle's counsel, and perchance be at the brook now. But he wasn't; nor was he there next morning, nor that afternoon, and poor little Aurora's heart grew sicker and sicker as the hours dragged by and he did not come.

Perhaps he had been sunstruck, was her agonized thought. But a moment's reflection showed her that if anything had happened to Garrett, the fact would have been neighborhood news long ere this.

Another day, and another went by, and the girl went faithfully to the brook twice each day, and waited and waited, going home each time to throw herself on her bed and cry, until a whole week went by and the misery in her face smote even her unobservant father with alarm. Questioned, she said there was nothing the matter, but her father watched her eating with an anxious eye, ordered chicken broth for her, and saw that she ate it, resting as content, when she did, as those kindly souls ever do who act on the belief that there can be no real ill if eating be possible.

Meanwhile, over at the Levering farm, a haughty boy nursed a grievance. It had been hot that afternoon,—certainly! Who knew it better than he, who had toiled two miles in the blistering mid-afternoon

sun to keep his tryst? She had but a few steps to come, down through the shady orchard, and yet she had kept him there waiting, a whole hour and a half of oven heat, augmented by his impatience to read to her a sonnet he had composed to her that morning. He considered it the finest thing he had ever done in a poetic way. Using a poet's license to cover the anachronism, he acclaimed Aurora as her

"Whose name the Dawn hath borrowed to express

Acme of dewy freshness."

Hot, hurt, and very angry, Garrett returned home. His first impulse, to destroy the sonnet, was succeeded by the sober second thought that a fine poem was worth all the girls in existence. Suppose Keats had torn things up when Fanny Brawne irritated him! Perish the thought! But no,

—it was not such a bad thought after all, for did it not lead to the reflection how poets, in all times, have suffered at the caprice of vain, silly women and thus, "cradled into poetry by wrong," have "learned in suffering what they teach in song."

This enduring indignities in great company kept Garrett interested and busy, poetically busy, for a week, at the end of which time he was confronted with an old, old need,—the need of some one to read his passionate verses to.

He considered Aunt Leila for the honor, but recalled what she thought of poetry for all but the strictly leisure class; he thought of Uncle Amos, but knew him to be out of the question. Finally he thought of Aurora! To tell the truth, the idea of what posterity might think of his heart-broken verses did not move him

to half the curiosity he felt to know what she would think of them whose light caprice had called them into being.

After eight interminable days, therefore, he repaired to the brook, and there, as he had confidently expected, he found Aurora, pale and red-eyed, and so very, very humble that he forgave her at once, though he had not meant to. Also, when she cried, he kissed her, which he had not meant to do either, and which, when it was done, so surprised and confused them both that they sat silent for a long while; the kiss had disarmed them both for the defensive, and made each anxious to claim the fault.

Presently Garrett noticed that Aurora had a book in her lap, the red-bound book of Jean Ingelow's poems she had had when he found her here in June, and on his speaking of it, Aurora opened up her heart about her poem.

"I never could understand it," she said, the tears shining in her brown eyes, "but now I do. It was a misunderstanding,—a little, little thing, at first, but neither of them would 'cross over' until it had grown so big they could n't, and it was too late."



Part Three



Part Three

AFTER Garrett left that summer, a divine discontent stirred the spirit of Aurora.

"Pa," she had said to Jake Russell in May, "I wish we could have our house painted. I'm ashamed to live in such a shabby house."

And, "Well now, 'Rory," her father had replied, thoughtfully, "I dunno but we kin. What color would y' like it?"

When Garrett was coming, her anxieties were all directed toward a better material showing. She had felt the defiant pride of the brownstone house that towered into the sky.

When he left, Aurora had well-nigh forgotten the tall house and all it implied, for Garrett's boastfulness had evolved from the prowess of his father and the height of his dwelling to things worlds-removed from the material. He confided to Aurora how little likely his people were to appreciate his determination to be a poet, and there came a noble dignity into his bearing when he spoke of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune that he expected to suffer in his ardent spirit, and the path of anguish that would doubtless be his path to fame.

"You must be my Mary Shelley, Aurora," he had told her. And, with eyes very round with awe and sympathy, Aurora promised that she would.

"Pa," she said to Jake Russell, the day after Garrett left, "I want to go to school."

"Why, 'Rory," was his surprised

comment, "I thought y' 'd been through the school!"

"Oh, that school!" retorted Aurora, contemptuously, "that's nothing! I mean to a real school, where you get education. I want to go to a Young Ladies' Seminary, Pa, and learn about gods and goddesses and something called mythology."

"Well, now, 'Rory, I dunno but ye kin,' said Jake Russell; "where 'd y' like to go?"

And Aurora never knew what that drawling assent that seemed to come so easy cost the man whose idol she was. It was n't dismay of the physical separation that laid so cold a clutch on Jake Russell's heart. It was n't the silence of the old house he dreaded, the echoing emptiness of the little room under the eaves. He could have borne that cheerfully, if it seemed for 'Rory's good. What

threatened him was the renewal of an old tragedy; yet it never occurred to him to fight for his heart's demands; it never occurred to him that there was anything for him to do but acquiesce.

To a Young Ladies' Seminary in Elmira, therefore, Aurora went, and there she learned a great deal about gods and goddesses and something called mythology, for she took what was called the classical course. And if the teachers wondered at her avidity for Latin verbs and Greek fables, it was because they did not know of a boy in his freshman year at a great New England college,—a boy who wrote Odes and Elegiacs so full of classical allusions that it required the most downright "plugging" to interpret them.

Letters that year fluttered thick as leaves in Vallombrosa, but in June

Garrett's oft-reiterated promise to summer at Overbrook was rescinded. He had fallen behind his class in mathematics (hateful, unpoetic things!) and must summer where he could do "some tall tutoring," if he would enter on his sophomore year with his class.

Aurora cried herself to sleep every night for a week after the heartbreaking letter came. She thought the long, weary weeks of the lonely summer would never drag to an end. There was nothing to make them tolerable but her letters to Garrett and Garrett's less frequent letters to her.

During his sophomore vacation Garrett came to Overbrook for a brief fortnight. The rest of the summer he was engaged for other visits. But a fortnight was long enough to blow into lively flame a sentiment that letters had not kept from dwindling to a mere glow.

Aurora appealed potently to his imagination, and she might well have spared herself, poor little maid, the oceans of tears she shed in terror lest some of the stylish girls of his acquaintance win him from her. There was no stylish girl in all his world who had one tithe of Aurora's reverence. She was all compounded of a great wistfulness and a sympathy that was half brooding, wholly worshipful. Other girls exacted; Aurora paid tribute. So Aurora had no rival.

In his junior vacation Garrett went abroad, but he ran up to Overbrook at Easter, and spent three days "seeing Uncle Amos." It was then they became engaged.

Easter was in mid-April that year, and with it came a week of the exceptionally warm weather which April oftentimes brings to that part of the country. Buds unfolded almost as one watched them, and the bushes along the brook in the south meadow wore the tender green of poesy and the world's youth.

Garrett talked to Aurora of his career, and she listened raptly.

"But you must help me, dear," he said; "I need you. You are my good angel." And Aurora wept for joy, hiding her face on his shoulder, and said she would love him and live for him till she died.

After Garrett went back to college, there came to Aurora, in Elmira, a slender wire of gold for her finger, and hanging from it a bangle in the shape of a heart set with tiny turquoises.

She graduated that June, and Jake Russell went to Elmira to see her in her ruffled white swiss and her fluttering white ribbons, and to hear her read her essay on "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."

She had gone back to school after the Easter vacation without confiding to her father the sweet secret of her plighted troth; but as they were riding home to Overbrook, her school life behind her, Jake Russell asked her fondly, what she was going to do, now, with all her "learnin'."

And Aurora looked up into his face with the serene look of one who has never been gainsaid, and replied:

"I'm going to marry Garrett as soon as he gets a start in his career."

Jake Russell was not surprised, at least, not greatly. He had expected as much, and had nerved himself for it. "What is his career?" he asked Aurora, politely.

"Poetry," answered Aurora, fervently.

Jake Russell said nothing for some seconds. Then, laying a rough, brown hand on Aurora's slim white one, he crushed it in an eloquent pressure.

"I hope you'll be almighty happy, little gal," was all he said.

Garrett kept silence touching his romantic hopes much longer than Aurora. He graduated with some éclat, for he was class poet, and the professors said encouraging things about his prospects in a literary way. Presumably they never impressed it on him that man cannot live by verse alone, and that poesy is not properly a profession, but a state of mind that need not be inimical to any honest method of earning a living.

Garrett had his starvation-in-anattic period, like Balzac and the lamented Chatterton and others whose names and sufferings were, in those days, constantly on his tongue. He had, too, his fateful period of compromise when he consented

"For life,

To work with one hand for the booksellers While working with the other for himself And Art."

And, contrary to his direful foreboding, could find neither himself nor his art any whit the worse therefor.

During these days it may well be believed, however, that, except in his impassioned letters to Aurora (impassioned with his sense of the complete, fundamental "wrongness of things"), he said little enough about marriage. Aurora, who cared

so little about the material as to be almost abnormal, yearned to share the attic and the crust (which were fairly figurative, however), but deferred to Garrett's assurance that it would be impossible.

With her whole soul she longed for him, — for the sound of his voice. the touches of his hands, the thrill of his presence. But if she was different from Jake Russell in many respects, she was like him in others. and she accepted what seemed to her the inevitable with quiet uncomplainingness. There were times when her great wistfulness for her boy lover was almost more than she could bear, and she would creep out to the south meadow and sit in the shade of the bushes by the brookside and shut herseyes tight, and try to imagine him beside her. And when the effort failed her, as it was bound

to (poor child!), she would lay her head on the grass and cry, — silently, not bitterly nor rebelliously, but with a piteous loneliness.

She read Keats and Shelley more in those days than Jean Ingelow and Longfellow, but the poem about the brook was always, for its associations, very dear to her, and its symbolism was rich in satisfyingness; it had something in it for almost every lonely mood.

Sometimes she thought it was the necessity of bread-winning, — the curse imposed at Eden's barred and guarded gate, — that tore men away from the women whose hands they had clasped in the flower-starred meadows of youth. And sometimes she told herself that the dividing stream was a stream of caste, of small account in childhood, but impassable in later years

But always love overcame fear, and she returned to her belief that across the spaces of country and caste and the world-old separation of the Curse, she had tight hold of his hand, and, so holding it in all despite, would live and die.

She taught the country school at Overbrook in those years of waiting, and it was their plan that Garrett should spend his fortnight's vacation at his Uncle Amos's each year. But it is easier to plan, God knows, than to accomplish. The summer after his graduation Garrett was left fatherless, and it was out of the question that he should desert his mother in the poignancy of her fresh grief to idle away the bright, sad days at Overbrook.

He ran up the following New Year's and spent the day with her, and was gone again ere she could realize that he had really been with her save as he always was, in her dreams.

After various efforts to dispose of poetic dramas and narratives in blank verse to the magazines, Garrett had adjusted himself, though not without bitterness, to the demands of a prosaic time and race, and whittled industriously at articles on social reform and kindred topics.

The adjustment hurt Aurora more than it had hurt him. She resented, both for herself and for him, the world's refusal to receive him, on his own terms, with open arms. But social reform was in the air (as it usually is, in one shape or another), and if Garrett could not get the public to hearken to his reform utterances when he spoke in verse, as Shelley had spoken, he could gather hearers a-plenty, he found,

when he set forth the same ideas in story form.

It would seem as if the very best youth that can go into the making of a potent maturity must be compounded of wild flights of fancy, untrammelled desire, and the unabashed bombast of expectation that transcends the bounds of mere hope. One must, while the soaring power is strong, go up very, very high, in order that when one "settles down" the settling may not reach too low a level.

Garrett had been an absurdly natural, ingenuous youth, and he became, in due process of shaking up and settling down, something more than a dull, feebly-aspiring man. He succeeded. He had enthusiasm, and the world loves enthusiasm,—if it can understand it. And he had self-confidence, and the world loves

self-confidence,—if it be tactfully concealed.

Garrett's first book gained him recognition among the few who discern keenly; his second gained him a fame among the many who acclaim loudly. His third book made him a full-fledged celebrity.

Aurora, teaching and longing at Overbrook, received from him bundles of newspaper clippings in which his work was extolled, and gloried in them so that she tried not to remember that the letters enclosing them were oftentimes hurried and scant.

There was nothing niggardly in the letters she wrote Garrett. She never dreamed it, and he was not aware of it (so gradually had Aurora developed, in his knowledge of her), but they were really wonderful letters,—the outpouring of a woman's heart such

as it is seldom a man's privilege to receive.

Poetry had never tilted futilely against practicality in Aurora's life. Such practicality as she knew was quite mechanical, and no more interfered with her poetry than breathing interferes with love. She lived in a world of the spirit, and her feet touched the homely, familiar earth unconsciously. She read, not widely but searchingly, not so much with intelligence as with passion, and she dreamed exceedingly, without bounds.

In Garrett's presence, on the few occasions when he was able to be with her for a hurried visit, she was constrained in the greatness of her joy. It was when he was away from her and she sat in her schoolroom, after the children were gone, or in her little room at home under the

eaves, and poured out her heart to him on paper, that she came nearest to satisfying him.

He would have missed her letters sorely; her bodily presence he had learned to do without. Thus it came about that, dependent as he was on her in a way, Garrett had never been impelled to make sacrifices to have her constantly by him.

It was sweet to think of the girl up in the country who loved him and revered him and followed his every move toward his goal with burning, eager interest. It was sweet to get her impassioned letters, full of unconscious beauty. It was sweet to despatch her the first copy obtainable of each of his books; to inscribe them, "To her who has helped me most of all," and to know that she gloried more in that inscription than in any other the world could have

written over against her name. All these were sweet, but his life was very full. One cannot serve two masters at any time, but least of all if one of them be Success.

There was never any hint of reproach in Aurora's letters, nor in her manner when he saw her,—never any hint that the waiting was weary to her, that she felt her youth slipping by,—the years when she should have come into her kingdom of home and wifehood and mother-hood. She never upbraided him when he broke his engagements with her to keep others that seemed more demanding to a man whose face was set determinedly toward success.

And so the years went by, — with incredible swiftness to the man in the hurly-burly of tense, nervestraining life; with intolerable slow-

ness to the woman in the farmhouse at Overbrook.

For two years Garrett Levering had not been to Overbrook. was working as no slave ever worked, he told her, - working on a book that was to be far and away superior to anything he had yet done. Every hour he could get from bread-winning went into the book. When it was finished, they would celebrate in long days by the brook in the south meadow, he told-her. When it was finished, he would give himself a real vacation, would rest on his oars awhile, and see how far the momentum of these straining strokes would carry him. She must excuse his hurried letters, —he felt that every pen-stroke of which he was capable should go into the book. She must forgive him for forgetting to send her a birthday remembrance,

— he hadn't torn a page off his calendar pad in weeks.

She excused, she forgave, she condoned neglect and overlooked the grinning grimaces of the monster, Self-Absorption. And she counted the weeks until the approximate time he had set for the book's completion.

"In six weeks I'll come," he wrote her; and then, "You may expect me in about three weeks;" and then:

"I don't know what you'll think of me, Aurora dear, but I've contracted for another book to be delivered not later than six months from now. I didn't mean to do it,—didn't want to, really; but the offer came unsolicited, and it was so flattering I didn't feel I dared refuse. My hand is tired; my brain is tired. I want to see you and I

cannot. But I must make a beginning. After that, the rest will come, somehow."

That night Aurora lay long on the floor of her little room beneath the eaves, her head on her arms, which were stretched, in an abandon half weariness, half wistfulness, on the window-sill.

Later, when the lights in all the houses in Overbrook had gone out, a lamp burned in the little room that had seen so much of the travail, as child and woman, of a loving heart.

Still there was no reproach in the letter, — only sorrow.

"You may remember," she wrote, "the poem of Jean Ingelow's I have often spoken of to you. I can't get it out of my mind to night. I used to think it was a quarrel that divided them, but I don't think so now; people get over quarrels, even the

worst. And I used to think it might be caste, social differences, an everwidening inequality of means or mind; but I don't think so now, for if the books, which are all my world, speak the truth, love is greater than these. I think it was a career, dear-I think she helped him find it, when they were both young and lighthearted and thought only of how they would journey into the great world by its winding flow, and never dreamed how, presently, it would divide them, and how, always, it would widen the breach between them from thenceforth. I don't know, now, why they don't go back when they see that they must let go each other's hands to follow farther, -or why one of them does not cross over. But I guess there's no going back along the way we've come; I guess it's the law of life that we

have to keep on in the way our feet are set, and there's no crossing over, -each to his own side, with the stream between; first, kisses thrown across, then calls of mutual reassurance, then only signals of-remembrance, then nothing, — void, silence, the sunshine on the broad bosom of the river, cowslips giving place to cities on its brim, the current threading the mazes of commerce instead of the long, sweet grasses of the meadows, and by and by the ocean. the illimitable, the end, — and not even the faint flutter of a far, white handkerchief discernible when one puts out to sea. To-night, dear, as I knelt by the window of my little room and looked out, out, out in fancy over the broad earth, and then up at the kindly stars above, it seemed to me that the world must be full of men and women who have

suffered this great, universal anguish, this letting-go of hands . . . and, oh, dearest, your signals are already growing faint. I can no longer touch your hand across the little stream. I can hardly hear your old familiar voice. The cowslips are far, far behind, the masts and spires of the city loom in the near prospect; beyond them is the ocean! I know you'll be angry, I know you'll call me blind, foolish, selfish; but, oh. I wish we'd never left the meadows: I wish we'd never let go hands: I wish there were no river, no city of masts and spires!"

Shortly after noon the next day, Jake Russell walked into the little office where Garrett Levering did his writing, and laid a letter on the desk where sheets of Garrett's new book lay scattered. "'Rory's sick," said the older man, abruptly; "she was took in the night, and I found that letter, addressed to you, in her room. I've read it," he finished and waited.

Garrett read the letter, then laid his head in his arms, folded on his desk, and wept. The hard lines about Jake Russell's mouth broke, and his lips twitched as he laid a rough hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Thank God fer givin' you this fair notice," he said; "not many of us git it."

And late that night Garrett crept up to the little room under the eaves where Aurora lay, spent with the spirit's weariness, and bent over her and whispered, "Give me your hand to hold, my dear,—till death do us part."











